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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND
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Agenda item 9

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FIRST PART OF ITS THIRTY-SECOND SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Miss Sally E. MOSS (Bahamas)

III. PROGRAMME QUESTIONS

E. Evaluation

1. At its 3rd and 5th through 8th meetings, on 11 through 14 May 1992, the Committee considered three evaluation reports. At its 6th and 8th meetings, on 13 and 14 May 1992, the Committee considered the oral report given by the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Development as announced in the note by the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/1992/4) of 30 March 1992.

Conclusions and recommendation

2. The Committee confirmed the importance of evaluation for improving the effectiveness of United Nations programmes and for ensuring the efficient use of limited resources, and expressed satisfaction with the quality of the reports on the major programme on social development and humanitarian affairs (E/AC.51/1992/2) and the human rights programme (E/AC.51/1992/3).

3. The Committee recommended that the preparation and distribution of documentation should be further improved through better planning by the Secretariat.

1. Programme evaluation in the United Nations: assessment of evaluation activities and proposals for strengthening the role of evaluation

Discussion

4. A number of delegations considered that the report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/47/116) contained useful assessments of United Nations evaluation activities of the recent past and suggestions for strengthening evaluation in the future. A number of delegations were, however, of the view that some parts of the report should have been more analytical and action-oriented. One delegation stated that the report lacked a "pedagogical approach" and was presented in a somewhat abstract manner. With regard to the conference room papers on new directions for evaluation in professional literature (E/AC.51/1992/CRP.1) and self-evaluations conducted during 1986-1991 (E/AC.51/1992/CRP.2), they were considered useful as reference and welcomed by a number of delegations.

5. Concern was voiced that self-evaluation had not yet been widely accepted by programme managers as a management tool, and that only a limited percentage of subprogrammes had so far been evaluated. A number of delegations suggested that the cause might have been the lack of an evaluation "culture" in the Secretariat and that, to the extent that programme managers did not conduct self-evaluations, Governments were deprived of information on the implementation of programmes.

6. A number of delegations stressed the need for both external and internal evaluations, since they tended to complement each other, but stated that more emphasis should be put on external evaluations, i.e. those independent of the line of authority relating to programme managers but preferably not outside the Organization or the United Nations system.

7. One delegation proposed the establishment of an Office of Inspector-General. The proposal received support from one other delegation.

8. The following topics for in-depth evaluation for 1996 and 1997 were mentioned in the discussion: environment, human rights, international trade, narcotic drugs and statistics.

Conclusions and recommendations

9. The Committee concluded that methodology for self-evaluation needed to be improved and some central standard-setting was now required, and that training in programme evaluation, including questionnaire formulation and sampling techniques, should also be improved. The Committee also concluded that findings from self-evaluation should be reported by programme managers to their respective governing bodies and that reports on the results of self-evaluations should be placed on the agendas of the specialized governing bodies concerned so that they could discuss those results. The mode of

transmission to specialized intergovernmental bodies of in-depth evaluation reports, together with the relevant recommendations of the Committee should be improved.

10. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly, when examining the recommendations contained in paragraphs 52 through 61 of the report, should take into account the following:

(a) Proposals for strengthening evaluation capacity, as suggested in paragraph 59 of the report, would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, taking account of paragraphs 348-350 of the Committee's report on the work of its thirtieth session in 1990 (A/45/16), and the Secretary-General's overall restructuring plan for the Secretariat;

(b) The arrangements for requesting, from the relevant specialized governing bodies comments on evaluation reports, as proposed in paragraph 61 of the report, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee thereon, would be adopted on a case-by-case basis, as decided by the Committee.

11. The Committee took note of the recommendation contained in paragraph 62 of the report.

12. The Committee postponed the decision on the topics for in-depth evaluation for 1996 and 1997.

2. In-depth evaluation of the major programme on social development and humanitarian affairs

Discussion

13. Some specific observations were made on the methodological recommendations for the in-depth evaluation. It was noted that the proposed methodology narrowly focused on the use of questionnaires as an instrument of data collection; another delegation suggested the inclusion of regional evaluation results in the in-depth report. The exclusion from the in-depth study of activities on crime prevention and criminal justice and the advancement of women was also discussed.

14. A number of delegations noted with concern the lack of progress in the integration of economic and social activities in practice, in spite of support for that integration in principle, as well as the inadequacy of resources devoted to programmes on social development. The Committee also noted the observation in paragraph 45 (a) of the report that "international awareness of the problems and needs of specific groups (the ageing, the disabled, women) has increased, but the increased awareness has not been translated into significant operational activities to support national efforts".

Conclusions and recommendations

15. The Committee noted with appreciation that the progress report on the in-depth evaluation of the major programme on social development and humanitarian affairs (E/AC.51/1992/2) contained preliminary information on the effectiveness of the programme and the Secretariat's recommendations on the scope of the in-depth evaluation, the issues to be addressed and the methods of data collection.

16. The Committee endorsed the methodological recommendations for the in-depth evaluation contained in paragraphs 49 through 55 of the progress report.

3. Triennial review of the human rights programme

Discussion

17. Delegations expressed their satisfaction with the quality and honesty of the report on the triennial review of the human rights programme (E/AC.51/1992/3). A number of delegations stated that the report's presentation of the various, sometimes conflicting viewpoints was the right approach for future triennial reviews, and perhaps for evaluation in general.

18. A number of delegations expressed concern about the problems faced by the Centre on Human Rights due to resource constraints. On the other hand, some delegations pointed out that despite these constraints much could and should be done. A number of delegations expressed their hope that the current temporary freeze in hiring would not affect the recruitment of additional staff needed by the Centre.

19. The importance of establishing a human rights database was recognized, and an offer of financial assistance was made by one delegation.

20. Coordination issues were recognized as very important, particularly the coordination between the Centre and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as that with non-governmental organizations, taking into account, as appropriate, the different mandates of respective bodies. A number of delegations stressed the importance of technical assistance provided by the Centre to countries. A number of delegations thought the role of Advisory Services should be more catalytic. Reservations were made by a number of delegations concerning the need for a full-time staff member for the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination and the involvement of non-governmental organizations in drafting new international instruments.

Recommendations

21. The Committee endorsed the recommendations contained in paragraphs 115 to 117 and 119 to 128 of the report on the understanding that United Nations organs perform their functions in accordance with their mandates; with regard to paragraph 125, the Committee was of the view that, in the drafting of any new international instruments, as may be decided, the involvement of non-governmental organizations would be in conformity with existing practice.

22. The Committee took note of the recommendation contained in paragraph 118.

23. The Committee recommended that, wherever possible, future triennial reviews should follow the presentation used in this report.

4. Progress report on the major programme on science and technology

Discussion

24. A number of delegations recalled General Assembly resolution 46/185 B and reaffirmed their view that the restructuring effected by the Secretary-General should not imply a standstill in activity nor should it affect the implementation of the existing mandates and the accomplishment of tasks in this area.

25. One delegation stated its appreciation of the oral report by the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Development. It considered that the requested report of the Secretary-General would no longer be useful and proposed that the issue be postponed indefinitely. A number of delegations were of the opinion that the oral report could not replace the report requested and that its presentation would have enabled the Secretariat, inter alia, to describe the rationale behind the restructuring of its coordination and support unit for the major programme on science and technology.

26. A number of delegations expressed great concern that full implementation of the General Assembly's resolutions on science and technology for development might be impaired in case of reduction of resources assigned to the major programme on science and technology as a consequence of the restructuring of both legislative organs and the Secretariat.

27. A number of delegations noticed a lack of explicit reference in the oral report to environmental issues in spite of their relevance to the work of the United Nations in science and technology and in particular to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and Agenda 21.

Conclusions and recommendations

28. The Committee expressed regret that the report requested at its thirtieth session, which was to have contained a conclusive analysis and proposals for solving the problems associated with the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development, had not been prepared and took note of the explanations provided by the Secretariat.

29. The Committee decided to discuss the issue of science and technology for development in the context of the forthcoming revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 and the revised estimates of the 1992-1993 programme budget at its resumed session, in order to determine whether, in the light of the information contained in the revisions to the major programme on science and technology for development and the revised estimates, additional information would be needed for the thirty-third session of the Committee.